



Bible Confidence: Session 3 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. Intro slide
2. **Understanding key themes: Covenant: How does the Bible describe the relationship God wants with us?**
3. The relationship God wants with human beings is the same throughout the Bible story and is best described by the word *covenant* – a theme that is repeated throughout. ① **Covenant is at the heart of God’s faithfulness to creation.** ① *“But I will establish my covenant with you: and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.” (Genesis 6:18)* The first mention of covenant is in the story of Noah. The Flood story is written as God’s wanting to *restore the world* through saving Noah, not to destroy it. The story makes clear that God cannot contradict Himself by abandoning His faithfulness to His creation, but ① re-commissions Noah in the same way as Adam was and with the same words. “As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.” (Genesis 9:7). But the covenant with Noah presents us a profound question which completely shapes how we view the world and its story: Why did God include the animals? When God makes His covenant with Noah, we read, “Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ① I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you— the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you— every living creature on earth....” (Genesis 9:8-11) ① He gives the rainbow as a sign of protection (like a bow) as a sign of the covenant. Christians thus have the most profound reason for caring for this earth because not only do we believe it is a creation, but we believe God has bound himself to the animals, the fish, the birds in loving relationship.
4. **God’s ① covenant with us enables us to be a blessing to the world, joining in with God in its restoration.** “The Lord ① had said to Abram, ‘I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’” (Genesis 12: 1-3) ① “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. God... announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you.” (Galatians 3: 7-8) ① Abram is blessed by God *in order to bless the world*. For Christians, Jesus does not *change* God’s original covenant but *fulfils* it – enabling us to be a people who continue the call to bless and restore God’s world, in the same way that Abram was called by God to do. ① *God intends to fix creation through a covenant people who will be a blessing*, so that ultimately everything will be renewed (Revelation 21:5), “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay...” (Romans 8: 21) and human beings can be “new creations”. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
5. **Covenant ① reveals the kind of relationship God wants with human beings.** ① *Covenant begins with being chosen.* It is through *particular* people (even today) that God chooses to work His purposes. By continuing to call people, the Bible demonstrates God’s continuing commitment to working in human-divine partnership – just as He does not abandon His creation, so He does not let go of the calling on people to image Him in the world. (This “chosenness” is never portrayed as favouritism – in a sense *everyone* is a child of God – but as Peter writes, we are chosen *for a purpose* – to be a blessing.) ① *Covenant is relationship in which God binds Himself to us.* Throughout the Bible it is God who initiates the restoring relationship. Having called Abram to be a blessing, God establishes a covenant with him. ① A covenant is an agreement between two parties that brings the two into an experience of oneness. Marriage is our most familiar existing covenant. In the Old Testament covenant was the fabric of society. There are two ways to have a covenant. In the first, two *equal* parties agree to become one. In the second, two *unequal* parties become one. In this, the one who is greater and stronger confers upon the weaker the right to come into an equal relationship. In the Bible, the type of covenant is usually *the stronger to the weaker* because usually it is between God and people. God confers rights on human beings. But it is still a relationship of *oneness*. Having *called* Abram in Genesis 12, in chapter 15 of Genesis God is ready to *ratify* His promise to him. At that time when a covenant was made it was ① always ratified in blood. It usually involved the ① exchange of property, and often included a change of name and the scarring of the person’s flesh. It was a serious affair – it meant that *life was going to change*. If two tribes entered into a covenant together they slaughtered their animals – a precious possession. The old life ends, a new begins. The life of the animal symbolised this death. They partook in a blood covenant by creating a corridor of blood. At each end of the corridor stood the representatives of the tribes – the chief or

groom. They exchanged places by walking along the corridor of blood. For example, if a tribe of cattle keepers and sheep keepers changed places they would be signifying this: ① “We who once looked after cattle, now look after cattle and sheep,” and vice versa. We possess everything of each other. We two have become one. They changed their names and to indicate it was ① a lifelong covenant. Two representatives would cut the heel of a hand and rub mud in it to keep the scar there forever. There was a new ‘oneness’ between what had been a ‘twoness’.

6. Abram ① has received the promise – that he would become a great nation, a blessing. But in Genesis 15 he worries that has no heir who would make this promise possible and he questions God about it. In response God tells him to count the stars in the sky, and then bring Him a heifer, and a goat, and a ram. Abram splits them in half and lays out the pieces to create a corridor of blood. ① “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land...”” (Genesis 15: 17,18) ① Abram is now one with God *in a way that’s never been known before*. Everything that belongs to God is now available to Abram. The land belongs to God but is now available to Abram. However, this is not an *exchange* of property – Abram gives *nothing* to God in return. The further two parts of the covenant are given in Genesis 17 when Abram is ninety-nine years old, with no children. God graciously says, “I will confirm my covenant between me and you...” He gives Abram a new covenantal name, to remind him of his new identity. ① “No longer will you be called Abram (exalted father); your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a “father of many nations.” (Genesis 17: 5) ① To do this, in Hebrew God took from his name YHWH one of the pieces of his name and included it in Abram to become Abraham. ① He gives a sign of the covenant: “Every male shall be circumcised”. Crucially, in the days of Abraham, a man who walked along the street with a visible scar was to be feared – you didn’t know who he was in covenant with. But God institutes a personal, private scar, signifying a private and personal relationship.
7. For ① Christians who are children of Abraham, how does understanding covenant shape us? *Exchange of identity*: ① “This is my new covenant, sealed in my blood.” (Luke 22:20) In the same way that a covenant was established through blood, to be in Christ means we have passed through a corridor of blood - His. And through the cross we exchange identities: He takes our rebellious identity – our sin – and we take His - His righteousness. ① *Inheritance*: Just as in Abram’s covenant God shared His ‘property’, so through Christ we receive the same identity and relationship that Christ has with His father. “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...” (Romans 8: 16-17) ① *Change of names*. “...to him who overcomes...I will write on him the name of my God and my new name.” (Revelation 3:12). In the early church when you were baptised you got a new name – your *Christian* name. ① *Sign/scar/seal*. “Circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit.” (Romans 2:29) Paul’s teaching is that the Holy Spirit has made a scar which is so intimate it is not on our bodies but *within* us –on the heart – the inner person. “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...” (Ephesians 1: 13-14)
8. Incredibly ① God continues to bear the scars of His covenant with us, taking them into His resurrection. In Luke 24, ① when the resurrected Jesus appears and shows his disciples his scars first of all he is saying, “This is a ① covenant. Not only is it ratified in blood, but it’s an everlasting covenant...These scars are precious tokens of the covenant I have with you.”
9. **Covenant ① shapes how we see God’s character throughout the Bible.** ① Some may read the New Testament God as loving and kind, but the Old Testament as angry and vengeful – as if there are two gods. But at the heart of it is the story of a covenant God who ① does not abandon His people despite their faithlessness. God makes a number of covenants throughout the Old Testament – with ① Noah, Abram, Moses (Genesis 19: 1-6) and David (2 Samuel 7: 12-13). To the Jews in Egypt He promises, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.” (Exodus 6:7) He will renew His covenant with His people so that “...they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” because “It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors...because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them...” ① This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” (Jeremiah 31: 31-34)
10. Which of these themes do you need to explore more and why: Your role in God’s *creation*, your identity as being in God’s *image*, or the meaning of God’s *covenant* with you?

11. Key themes: how is worship at the centre of the Bible’s story, and our lives?

12. Alongside ^① covenant, *worship* is the most *consistent theme* throughout the Old Testament – our first calling – and it shapes the meaning of Christian discipleship. The daily Jewish prayer, called the ^① *Shema*, calls God’s people to “...love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5) Worship is the *expression of this love* and seen in these ways: ^① **Obedience**. This is a love rooted in genuine feelings, but also *expressed in actions*. “What does the Lord your God ask of you...to keep His commands.” (Deuteronomy 10: 12-13) Yet this is not a dry obedience, but a *response* to God’s love. In the New Testament this is expressed in the simple line, ^① “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)
13. **Sacrifice**. ^① Leviticus describes five separate sacrifices or offerings which the people were instructed to give in their temple meetings. Some were sacrifices to deal with sin, but some were *expressions of giving thanks*. After Jesus’ death and resurrection there is no need for a sacrifice to take away sins but the theme of *worship that costs us something* continues, with Paul encouraging Christians to, ^① “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1) ^① **Praise and thanksgiving**. Not every Psalm is praise or thanksgiving but many encourage the people to, ^① “Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name” (30:4) and “Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.” (47:1)
14. **Worship ^① throughout the Bible** To worship God in these ways is the key calling of God’s covenant people running throughout the story of the Bible. Towards the beginning of the story God tells Moses to approach Pharaoh with these words: “Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ^① ‘Let my son go, so that he may worship me.’” (Exodus 4: 22-23) ^① **We all worship something** The story of Israel shows how when human beings turn from worshipping God, we put something else in His place. Throughout the Bible ^① *idolatry* is the central symptom of our disobedience. “Then they said, ^① ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’” (Exodus 32: 1-4)
15. The first three Commandments (Exodus 20) call the Israelites to have *no other gods*. ^① Yahweh alone is worthy of worship. But if our ^① allegiance is not to Him, there is *no reason to keep His other commandments*. More seriously, for God, the issue is not that His people are breaking the law, but that they are ^① breaking *relationship* with Him. ^① Augustine said that sin isn’t breaking the law but is *loving things in the wrong order*. Idolatry is making things that ultimately cannot fulfil us into what we worship, into what we place at the centre of our heart. The ^① essence of sin is not bad things. It is turning a good thing *into an ultimate thing*. ^① God’s call on His people to love Him *first* is the call to live a life of worship in which we love things in the right order.
16. **Understanding key themes: What does the Temple show about God’s presence and His continuing plan for a recreated world?**
17. Throughout the Bible the call to be a worshipping people is linked to the reality that God wants ^① His people to experience His presence with them. It is through ^① various forms of a Temple (three physical and one spiritual) that God both creates a way in which He can *dwell* with humans, and a sign of how He is working through them to recreate the world. ^① The Temple is a way in which heaven (God’s presence and space) and earth (human presence and space) can overlap.
18. **God’s ^① presence** Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3) is an astounding encounter with God’s presence. Yet after the Exodus ^① when the people return to Mount Sinai *the whole mountain* is on fire (Exodus 19). God wants to be present to *His whole people*. After the escape from Egypt God seeks to find a way in which the holiness of His presence can be with His covenant people once again. “Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. ^① They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.” (Exodus 29: 45-46) After giving Moses the law, ^① nearly a third of the book of Exodus is taken up with detailed instructions for a moveable Tabernacle, a Tent of Meeting, and the setting up of a priesthood, so that the Israelites may have a place of being put right with God and coming to Him in worship. The fact that there are so many details recorded shows its significance. It contained ^① altars for sacrifices and places for ^① ceremonial washing. Its ^① twelve loaves of bread symbolised both the tribes of Israel and the *completeness of God’s provision*, the ^① Ark (containing the Ten Commandments) symbolised God’s presence and the ^① lampstand His *protection*.
19. Exodus finishes with God’s coming to the Tabernacle. ^① His *occasional* presence is now His *permanent* presence with His people – the full restoration of His presence within creation as He originally intended. This emphasis is why the Temple is not often referred to as ‘Temple’ in the Old Testament. Rather it is ^① “the House of the Lord” or “the place which the Lord will choose to make his name dwell” (Deuteronomy 12:11) or a “temple for my Name”. (1 Kings 5:5) ^① Their sense of God’s presence was *highlighted* by the

Temple, but *not dependent* on it. This connection between the Temple, worship and God's presence are repeated themes in the book of Psalms. " ① Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. (Psalm 84:1-4)

20. **The ① Temple as a recreation of the world** ① The tabernacle in the wilderness is an ordered creation in the middle of chaos, people centred around God, priests worshipping regularly in the same way that all of creation was made to worship God. Enns writes it is a ① "piece of holy ground amid a world that has lost its way".
21. **The ① wonder of being God's temple.** As the Bible story continues the promise that God's presence might fill all creation is increasingly realized as the ① physical Temple becomes replaced by a "living" one. ① Understanding the story of God's presence and Temple helps us to grasp the wonder of the gift God's Holy Spirit for disciples. This is a fulfilment of Christ's promise, " ① My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23) In the ① Old Testament people come to meet with God at the temple. In the New Testament *God comes to people and we become His temple.* As individuals each disciple can now become a Temple, in which God dwells: ① "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) As such, he calls us to treat our bodies with dignity and holiness. As a Christian community *we have become God's temple.* ① "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor 3: 16-17). ① This calls us to a unity through which the presence of God can be displayed to the world.
22. **Tackling tricky questions: What does it mean to believe that the Bible is human and divine?**
23. "All ① scripture is inspired by God (God breathed)." (2 Timothy 3:16) Christians believe that the Bible is divinely inspired. ① However, it is also a very human book. For example, as we have already seen, it draws from other ① sources, such as the creation myths of other cultures. It is obvious as well that being breathed by God cannot mean that the ① personalities, experiences, and characters of the individual authors are not included in the Bible. Paul says that he cannot remember who he baptised. (1 Corinthians 1:16) Matthew has Jesus incorrectly referring to Zechariah as the son of Berekiah instead of the son of Jehoiadah. (Matthew 23:35) Paul admits he received no command from the Lord regarding unmarried women, but was willing to give his own judgement as a trustworthy person. (1 Corinthians 7:25) ① Large parts of the Bible are not written as God speaking to us *but rather humans speaking to God* and in Psalm 89 the writer accuses God of breaking His promise. Most of what Job and his friends say to God throughout the book of Job is not true.
24. Rather than this being a problem which we have to try and find ways around, the human-divine nature of the Bible is *a precise reflection the way God works.* It is consistent with the way in which God always works *indirectly with human beings* to achieve His purposes. ① The way God relates to the world is not one-way but through *mutual relationships.* The Bible is a *partnership* in the same way that God giving human beings a 'cultural mandate' is a partnership. This means that throughout the writing of Bible ① God acts towards humans, but *He also allows them to act towards Him* (just as we see most fully on the cross), even at the cost of absorbing our sin and mistakes *as part of the text.* John Henry Newman describes this way of God breathing Scripture by comparing two Latin words for writer. ① The word 'author' describes someone who creates a work *without any help or influence from anyone else* – much as the Quran is a direct reciting of Allah's words. ① But the word 'auctor' describes someone who is the *first cause* of a work, but *who allows for other influences to contribute to the work* that the writer produces. God breathes His word by *emptying Himself* – just as throughout the Bible He *accommodates* Himself to us in order to reach us. This means that He is willing to speak to human beings from *inside* the world, taking our own experiences as His starting point. So it is not a case of God taking away human beings' ability to speak so that He can replace our words with His words. Instead, as an 'auctor', God takes the words and actions of human beings and uses them to become the reliable "word of God". ① He takes the initiative as His Holy Spirit works in the hearts and minds of the human writers, but *always leaving the personhood of the human authors in place*, which affects the results of His breathing through them.